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Ordinary Mysticism

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Ordinary Mysticism

Some of us enjoy a mystery story. Many of us take delight in being able to find a satisfactory explanation for an event that at first had been mysterious and seemingly incapable of being understood, such as an unusual creaking sound from some part of our living quarters. We are usually pleased when we can fit a new or unusual experience into some familiar terms.

Though we might not talk about them with many persons, most of us have had at least occasional interior experiences for which there was no apparent immediate explanation. Though such events might have at first elicited fear because of their unfamiliarity, yet we might be able to recall that the experiences were quite positive in themselves. Upon reflection, we might recognize that some mysterious experiences were quite beneficial.

One person, while working diligently and perhaps with some anxiety about how to bring a project to conclusion might suddenly have a clear thought that "all will be well" accompanied by a feeling of peaceful contentment. The moment passes, and the recipient might then think that the experience was aberrant, and so dismiss it, and never mention it to anyone. Another person might have a similar kind of experience, but consider it mysterious, and seek to understand it, and perhaps even talk about it with someone trustworthy. Much that is of value in life is partially mysterious, no matter how familiar we are with the words and concepts, and our every-day thoughts and actions.

Our willingness to reflect upon experiences that have occurred within our minds and hearts, which we did not consciously initiate, enables us to accept and appreciate aspects of our lives that are meaningful, pertinent, and supportive. Many movements of hope, trust, and love are mysterious to us when we experience them. As we identify and name them, they become so familiar as to be considered ordinary. The first time we found ourselves spontaneously giving something away to a person with an immediate need, we might have felt rather unsettled: "What did I just do?" But after considering the effects of this behavior, and perhaps naming it an act of kindness, we might realize with satisfaction that it befits us, and is not strange at all. If we ask ourselves how it happened that we acted as we did, we could consider the possibility of ordinary mysticism, and come to accept what we can only partially explain to ourselves.

If we try to understand, for example, how trust works, not as a concept, but as experiences of trusting God, or self, or others, we encounter mystery. But every act of trust is a gracious and ordinary mystery. We do trust (and we hope, and we love) whether or not we can well explain either how we do so

or precisely why. These interior movements of our hearts can be causes for much gratitude, as we become reflectively aware of the depth and quality of meaning that we find in our lives that arise from just such mysterious sources.

Ordinary mysticism is not about making judgments as to lower or higher levels of interior experiences, but of acknowledging the holy mystery that pervades the lives of us all as we strive to speak and act ever more "from the heart."